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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000231

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SUBJECT: FRETILIN PARTY CONGRESS WILL BE "A REAL FIGHT

REF: DILI 224

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REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: According to Embassy sources within and close to the ruling party, the Fretilin Party Congress scheduled to take place in Dili May 17-19, will be "a real fight". The competition will not only be between the two dominant candidates for Secretary General, but also over competing visions of the future of the party, which are to be enshrined in a revised party constitution approved at the congress. The heart of argument will be between two factions: those who want greater democracy within the party versus those around incumbent Secretary General, Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, who want to

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maintain the current system. Particularly important are the draft of criteria for key leadership positions which contain provisions that would disqualify the strongest candidates running against Alkatiri. This will likely be the focus of controversy at both the final pre-Congress meeting of the Fretilin Central Committee (CCF), being held May 13-14, and early in the Congress. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff yesterday spoke with a reliable and well-placed source regarding the Fretilin Party Congress scheduled to take place in Dili May 17-19. This source is delegate to the Congress from the Dili district and has access to CCF deliberations. He said that delegates to the Congress were prepared for a "real fight" both over leadership and the future organization of the party. According to this source, much of the leadership campaign will be carried out via discussions on the future structure of the Party, especially the Party Constitution and Political Manual, formally slated for day two of the Congress. The over-arching issue at hand in these discussions will be the distribution of power within the party. How the respective campaigns fair in this process will have a large influence on the leadership vote scheduled for day three.

13. (SBU) The source repeated what we have heard from many others: that an Alkatiri victory in the party would likely

produce an electoral loss for Fretilin in the 2007 national elections. He also reiterated criticisms of Jose Luis Guterres's campaign, noting that Guterres does not appear to have well-prepared proposals regarding party reform, does not have anyone with the intellectual firepower to develop such arguments, and does not have the right allies for a winning ticket. (Reftel provides an overview of comparative strengths and vulnerabilities of both candidates.)

14. (C) According to this source, the draft revision of the party constitution that has been approved by the Fretilin Central Committee (CCF) reflects the views of the Alkatiri camp and does little or nothing to further democratize the party. To the contrary, it establishes a Political Committee chaired by the Secretary General and empowered to act as the CCF in between CCF

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meetings. This would increase the Secretary General's powers vis-à-vis the CCF, in contrast to demands within the party for greater CCF autonomy and decision-making power.

15. (C) Not all pro-reform delegates are anti-Alkatiri. According to our source, there is a group of about 20 Dili delegates who are organized around Aniceto Guterres. (Aniceto Guterres is currently a member of the Truth and Friendship Commission. He is a highly-popular new Fretilin member who has also been mentioned as a possible Secretary General candidate but has indicated that he does not intend to run.) Another prominent member of the group is Francisco Branco, the majority leader in the National Parliament. This group is meeting in advance of the congress to discuss their priorities and ideas for the constitution. They are strongly pro-reform but have not aligned themselves with one of the other candidate. Reportedly there are similar groups in each of the districts, although they are smaller and probably less organized. Overall, there seems to be a significant portion of the delegates who are not yet convinced by Guterres and so might still be willing to accept continued Alkatiri leadership tempered by reform of the party's structure.

16. (SBU) The Embassy has obtained a copy of the regulations governing the Congress which have been approved by the CCF.

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Interestingly, the regulations require that candidates for the Secretary General and President of the Party run together on a

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single list. This could potentially disadvantage Guterres if he is unable to present a competitive running mate. Guterres has stated that he will push for the positions to be elected individually. The regulations are still pending ratification by the Congress, but are not on the agenda for further discussion. Changes will require a special motion by at least ten percent of the delegates.

16. (SBU) The Embassy has also obtained a copy of the draft criteria for leadership positions within the Party. Some observers have expressed concern that these criteria will effectively disqualify Ambassador Guterres from running as they stipulate a minimum of five years residency in East Timor prior to taking office. However, this will most likely not present an obstacle as political assignment at overseas embassies is reportedly still regarded as residency in the national territory. In addition, the criteria specify that all candidates for office must have been members of Fretilin for a minimum of two years. This would make Aniceto Guterres ineligible to run for either the Secretary General or President positions. (Despite his stated reluctance to run for party office, Aniceto Guterres is frequently cited by others as the best possible running mate for Ambassador Guterres or as a Secretary General candidate in his own right.)

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17. (C) According to our information, the criteria for

leadership positions, as well as the party constitution, are under discussion during the current CCF meeting (May 13-14). The nature of these discussions will determine the prospects for reform within the party and will further clarify emerging political alliances. The Embassy is monitoring the CCF meeting through our sources (it is closed to the public) and will report septel.

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